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ABSTRACT

This study was designed to determine forensics students' ability to predict accurately how judges they knew from previous tournaments would rank them in rounds of competitive individual events. The study examined the following hypotheses: (1) contestants can predict how they will do in rounds of competition; and (2) contestants in prepared oral interpretation or public speaking events are more likely to predict successfully their ranking than are contestants in limited preparation events. Fifty-seven contestants of the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament, all of whom were familiar with a tournament judge, predicted their rank from that judge in a given section of the tournament. After matching their predictions with the actual rankings received from the judges, a t-test analysis generally indicated a significant difference between prediction and actual rankings, with contestants tending to predict higher rankings than they actually received. Neither hypothesis was supported by the data: students were not good predictors of their rankings, and contestants in prepared events were not better predictors than those in limited preparation events. Moreover, knowing a judge did not help the contestants' ability to predict their ranking. Since one justification for eliminating the low rank and low rating at national forensic tournaments rests on the premise that students can predict when they will receive a low ranking from a judge they know (contributing to psychological distress), this study suggests that the procedure is unnecessary. (JG)

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STUDENT PREDICTIONS OF JUDGE BIAS: ILLUSION OR REALITY?

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Presented at the Annual Convention of the Speech Communication Association, Boston, Massachusetts, November 5, 1987.

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Abstract

This study explored the ability of students to predict their rankings in rounds of competitive individual events from judges they identified as knowing. Contestants at the 1987 District 4 Qualifying Tournament for the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament were surveyed to: (1) determine if they knew their judges; and (2) assess what they expected their rankings from these "known" judges to be. The findings suggested that students were not able to predict their actual rankings.

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Students competing in forensic activities have long been self-proclaimed masters in the "art of prediction." These students have predicted how they would finish in a round of competition based upon their speaking order and they have seemed to know when a judge didn't rank them high even when they thought they had done a good job in the round. Despite the mystery surrounding these predictions and others made made by students during any given forensic tournament, and the unwillingness of most coaches to accept the basis for these thoughts, that which is predicted often seems to "come true."

This ability to predict the rankings of judges has not received attention from forensic scholars. However, the effect of the judge who provides the unexpected ranking (commonly referred to as "the squirrel judge") has been the basis for a number of studies designed to determine the effect of dropping the low ranking and low rating (not necessarily on the same ballot) on the pool of contestants who advance to the elimination rounds at national individual events tournaments (Littlefield, 1986, 1987). The creation of the procedure to drop the low rank and rating was first based upon a need felt by a number of coaches and contestants. It seemed that contestants who knew

their judges from past tournament experiences and had received a low ranking from these judges, were predicting that these judges would again punish them with a low ranking; thereby keeping them from advancing into the elimination rounds. The "psychological effect" of dropping the rank and rating on the contestant who expected the "squirrel rank or rating" was cited as the major reason justifying the creation and maintenance of this practice, despite the fact that statistically, the group advancing into the elimination rounds would not have been significantly altered by using the procedure as specified.

The reliability of students being able to predict how judges would rank them and the absence of research in this area has prompted the study of the following research hypotheses:

H1: Contestants can predict how they will do in rounds of competition.

H2: Contestants in prepared oral interpretation (prose, poetry, drama, dramatic duo) or prepared public speaking events (persuasive, informative, communication analysis, after dinner speaking, sales speaking) are more likely to successfully predict how they will be ranked than contestants in limited preparation events (extemp speaking, impromptu speaking).

METHOD

Instrument

A survey was developed to explore two questions: (1) Did the contestants know the specific judges who would be hearing

them perform at the tournament; and (2) if they knew a judge, what did they predict their rank would be from that judge in a given section at the tournament. If they predicted that they would receive a first place ranking in the round, they were asked to circle a 1; a second place rank would prompt their circling a 2; and so forth through fifth place resulting in a circled 5 on the survey form.

Subjects

Two hundred forty-one contestants at the 1987 District 4 qualifying tournament for the American Forensic Association's National Individual Events Tournament received a copy of the survey as a part of their registration materials. 112 contestants (47% of the population) returned their surveys. Of these, 57 contestants (51% of the respondents) knew at least one judge. Their completed survey forms became the data base for this study.

Design

These 57 contestants made 226 predictions about how they would fare from judges that they knew. These 226 predictions were matched with the actual rankings received from the judges. The pairs of predictions and actual rankings became the basis for the statistical tests used. A t-test was run to determine if the data suggested a significant difference between prediction and actual ranking. If the t-test produced a positive number, that

would indicate that contestants scored higher in their rounds than predicted. If a negative value were found for the t-test, the contestants scored lower in the round than predicted. A Pearson Correlation Coefficient was also produced to determine the correlation between prediction and actual scores. To determine the difference, the actual score was subtracted from the predicted score (Difference = predicted minus actual ranking).

RESULTS

The results from the t-test indicated that as a group, there was a significant difference between prediction and actual rankings received by students from judges they knew. The data suggest that for the total population, contestants tended to predict that they would receive higher rankings than they actually received (see Table 1).

Table 1
Difference Between Prediction and Actual Rankings Received by Contestants from Judges They Knew

N	Mean	Standard Error	T	PR>|T| α=.05
226	-0.420	0.105	-4.00	0.0001

The various events offered at the tournament were grouped according to the categories "limited preparation" (impromptu speaking and extemporaneous speaking), "prepared public speaking" (persuasive speaking, informative speaking, after dinner speaking, sales speaking, and communication analysis), and "oral interpretation" (prose, poetry, drama, dramatic duo). The

results from the t-test suggested for the "prepared public speaking" events and the "oral interpretation" events, there was a significant difference between predicted and actual rankings. This significance was not found to be true in the "limited preparation" events (see Table 2).

Table 2
Difference Between Prediction and Actual Rankings
by Groups of Events

Group	N	Mean	Standard Error	T	PR>|T|	$\alpha = .05$
Limited Preparation	54	-0.296	0.217	-1.36	0.1787	
Prepared Public Spkg	63	-0.444	0.183	-2.42	0.0184	
Oral Interp	109	-0.467	0.157	-2.97	0.0037	

To determine if a correlation existed between the predicted and actual rankings received by the contestants, an r value of .103 was calculated with significance found at the .12 level.

DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Overall, the first hypothesis was not supported. A significant difference was found between prediction and actual rankings received by contestants. There may be a number of reasons for this finding. The timing of the survey may have influenced the predictions. Students were asked to return their surveys prior to the start of the rounds. Due to the nature of competitive forensics, it is likely that contestants are most optimistic about the results prior to the start of the competition. Once the tournament starts, the contestant may

decide that other variables may cause them not to receive as high a ranking as they would have liked. These variables might include any of the following: (1) The competition was better than expected; (2) ill health; (3) personal distractions; or (4) team problems. Another reason why the contestants might have predicted higher scores than they received could be related to preparation factors for a particular contest. If a student were to have spent a significant amount of time preparing for a speech contest, s/he may feel more optimistic about the results than a student who was less prepared for a tournament.

Due to the nature of prepared events versus limited preparation events, one would expect that students might be better able to predict rankings in prepared events. However, the data did not support this hypothesis. Students in the prepared events (both public speaking and oral interpretation) were not able to predict their rankings. These contestants scored lower than they predicted. In the limited preparation events, the conclusion cannot be reached that there was a significant difference between predicted and actual scores. However, students also scored lower in this group than they predicted.

Part of the basis for justifying the continuation of the process of dropping the low ranking and rating at the National Individual Events Tournaments sponsored by the American Forensic Association and the National Forensic Association rests upon the premise that students can predict when they are going to receive a low ranking from a judge they know. By affording them the

dropped rank, the students have a more "positive feeling" about performing in a given round when they have a judge who is predicted to give them a low ranking. The results on the following table suggest that for students predicting a low rank of 4th or 5th in a round, five predictions were correct. Three were lower (meaning that for those predicting a 4th place rank, they actually were ranked 5th). However, sixteen received higher rankings than were predicted (see Table 3).

Table 3
Predicted and Actual Scores for Contestants
Who Expected to Receive a Low Ranking

Contestant Code	Event	Predicted Rank	Actual Rank
1103	Inform	4	2
	Poetry	4	3
1109	Duo	4	1
1402	Drama	4	3
	Prose	4	5
	Impromptu	4	4
1403	Impromptu	5	4
1604	Impromptu	4	1
1704	Persuasive	4	4
1919	Extemp	5	3
	Impromptu	5	4
2001	Drama	4	1
	Poetry	4	1
	Prose	4	1
2406	Drama	5	3
2603	Comm Analysis	4	5
2606	Prose	4	1
2705	Duo	4	1
2802	Extemp	4	5
2905	Duo	5	5
3002	ADS	4	3
	Drama	4	3
3003	Duo	5	5
3008	Prose	4	4

What all of this suggests is that students, as a group and based upon this sample, were not good predicters of their

rankings. Knowing a judge did not help the students to accurately predict how they would finish in a given round of competition.

CONCLUSIONS

This study provides further justification for the argument that the dropping of the low rank and low rating (not necessarily on the same ballot) is an unnecessary tournament management procedure. Earlier studies have suggested that the procedure does not produce a significantly different pool of contestants emerging into elimination rounds at national individual events tournaments (AFA, NFA, and Pi Kappa Delta); the process takes considerable time to complete; and students may not even be able to predict when a judge they know will award them with a low ranking in a round of competition. Without such an ability, the "psychological factor" becomes less compelling as the only reason for continuing to use the procedure.

Further research in the area of student predictions of judges' rankings might examine the judge pools at tournaments to determine if certain judges are more predictable than others. Also, individual student predictions may vary depending upon experience level and type of events. Just as events were grouped in this study, it may be possible to look at groups of contestants and judges to determine if any patterns of prediction emerge.

It would seem that there is now an opportunity to use this research to affect a change in the way final scores are

determined at national individual events tournaments. The question remaining is will those individuals who are responsible for determining the procedures to be used make use of this research? Perhaps finally a concensus regarding this issue will emerge and changes will be made.

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